

'Fresh' Start at Fish Market

New owners take over Back River Fish Market

By KEITH L. MARTIN

Passersby to the Back River Fish Market on Railroad Avenue may have noticed a few changes to the outside of the business, but it's the inside the new owners want shoppers to see.

Stocked with fresh fish, two live lobster tanks and prepared foods, Sandwich residents John and Cindy Payne are looking forward to their first business venture and long future in Duxbury.

The couple took over the Lobster Pound in June from previous owner Darryl Durnford and are hoping to restore the market to the way it was when it first opened 10 years ago under founder Don Merry. The couple has even dusted off Merry's original sign and returned the "Back River Fish Market" name to the business to usher in the new era of providing fresh, local seafood to customers.

"When we found out the business was for sale, we drove down and saw this beautiful storefront and town and a wonderful location," said John. "Coming from a culinary background and with my love of fishing, it all just came together."

With a 30-year career in the restaurant industry, John trained in Boston under executive chefs from France and in New York at culinary institutes. He began his career as a chef at Sante, a French restaurant in Plymouth, then moved on to work as an executive chef at a few private clubs in Cape Cod, including 12 years at Oyster Harbors in Osterville and three years as manager of the Pocasset Golf Club.

The restaurant business has added meaning to the Paynes since they met when John was a chef and Cindy was a waitress. The couple has been married for 15 years and have two daughters, Kelsey, 12, and Mara, 10, who've helped out behind the counter this summer.

In the couple's new endeavor, John has done more quality control than cooking, choosing fresh fish from Boston and oysters, littlenecks and mussels from local shellfisherman, picking out the best for his customers. He's added exotic offerings such as wild salmon and Chilean sea bass for shoppers looking for something different.

The store still offers fresh lobsters, which they will cook for free as well as an assortment of "kettle cuisine" soups, including their signature chowder, of which they are selling nearly 20 gallons a week.

Using John's culinary

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seafood recipes John has accumulated over the years.

The chef is willing to share his knowledge and offer his own recipe books for customers to look at and even borrow to prepare a gourmet meal themselves. The couple hopes to hang a recipe board at the store as well, offering a unique dish for every variety of seafood they have in their cases.

"A lot of people don't know how to make some of their favorite seafood dishes they order at a restaurant, but it is easy," said John. "Here, we can offer them tips and suggestions for a great meal."

What customers and others in Duxbury have offered since the couple's arrival in June

has been nothing but a warm reception, said Cindy.

"The welcoming we've gotten has been so wonderful and overwhelming," she said. "This is our first business and we know we can offer friendly services, the freshest fish and share some recipes with our customers. John has a lot of ideas."

The fish market's founding father, Merry, said he finds the couple "refreshing" and that they understand what it takes to run a good fish market.

"The one thing they stress that matters is quality," he said. "If you have something good, people will come back. John and his wife are there all the time and pay such attention to detail, which is also important. I wish them well."



FAMILY AFFAIR: The new owners of the Back River Fish Market, John and Cindy Payne, have combined quality seafood with quality help behind the counter, including daughters Kelsey, 12, and Mara, 10.

background, the Paynes have added a "lazy lobster casserole" for people on the go to reheat at home as well as a line of homemade butters to add to fish dishes in flavors such as tarragon and basil.

The goal, say the Paynes, is to increase the number of prepared meals for customers who've asked for a broader line of offerings and also take advantage of the numerous

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John Payne shows off the fish market's mascot, "711," a seven-pound, 11-ounce lobster that sits in one of their two lobster tanks.